Encyclopedia of Turkic Languages and Linguistics Online

Lingua Franca of the Levant

(2,757 words)

1. Definition and Turcological Relevance

The term 'Lingua Franca of the Levant' has entered
Turcological bibliography thanks to Henry and Renée
Kahane & Andreas Tietze's homonymous work on Turkish
nautical terminology of Italian and Greek origin. It forms
part of a wider lingua franca of the Mediterranean with a
Romance basis and Arabic, as well as Turkish elements.
This entry deals with the various nautical terms which
entered Turkish between the 13th c. and the 18th c.

In a sociolinguistic framework, 'lingua franca' stands for the
use of a contact vernacular as a means of communication
between native speakers of different, mutually unintelligible languages (Meyerhoff 2006: 245,
292). In this sense, languages such as English in many countries around the world or Arabic in
countries like Sudan, Chad, or Ethiopia can act as lingue franche; for Arabic see Miller (2016). In
such an interethnic and/or interreligious setting it is not only languages, often associated with
simplifications, such as rule generalization, dominance of analytical forms, or phonological
reduction, but also pidginized varieties that can serve as a lingua franca (Rickford & McWhorter
1998). The historical context of lingue franche includes trade contacts, military conquests,
globalization, and migration.

The term itself goes back to the so-called 'Mediterranean Lingua Franca', from the generic
Byzantine Greek expression φράγκικα, i.e., 'Frankish', for what Kahane & Kahane (1976: 30) call
the "Romance for Easterners". According to Kahane & Kahane (1976: 34), the Lingua Franca was
"the Romance - increasingly the Italian and, in particular the Venetian - spoken in the numerous
Venetian possessions and trading centers from Dalmatia to the Levant". The first researcher to
present some aspects of this pidginized variety of colonial Eastern Venetian, sometimes

associated with the term *sabir*, known from the first verse of the song in Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* "Se ti sabir" in a scientific article, was Hugo Schuchardt (1909, edited by Glenn G. Gilbert with an English translation in Schuchardt 1980: 65-88). According to other scholars very little is known about this Lingua Franca (Röll 1967: 306-307). Schuchardt stressed the fact that the Mediterranean Lingua Franca was not a Romance creole with Arabic or Turkish grammar, and thus, according to Gilbert, he anticipated Robert Hall's distinction between pidgin and creole languages (Schuchardt 1980: 65, 68). This Lingua Franca has been subsequently analyzed as a pidgin, based mostly on Italian and Spanish, spoken principally on the shores of Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, and generally in the western Mediterranean, on the ships of pirates and corsairs, as well as, though to a restricted extent, in the ports of the eastern Mediterranean coasts. It is also called *lingua franca barbaresca* (Cifoletti 2011). The written attestation, in documents and literary texts, exists until 1830, while the term *sabir* is, according to Cifoletti (2011: 338), reserved for the Lingua Franca in Algeria after the French conquest, and documented until the end of the 19th c. It seems to have been used extensively by Christian and Muslim sailors alike. A slightly different variety used by Jews is known as Judeo-Sabir (Schuchardt 1980: 87-88). From a structural point of view, Turkish is of lesser importance for this Romance-based Mediterranean Lingua Franca, but it played a prominent role as a mediator between Italian and Greek, on the one side, and Arabic, on the other side, for the distribution of vocabulary, especially in the nautical field, due to the presence of Turkish sailors in North Africa during the 16th c.

However, in the context of Turcological studies, the specific expression 'Lingua Franca in the Levant' differs from the aforementioned concept of the Romance-based pidgin described as Mediterranean Lingua Franca, and goes back to the impressive lexicographical work by Kahane et al. (1958), *The Lingua franca in the Levant*, designating the Turkish nautical terminology of Greek and Italian origin. In this thorough and voluminous study, 878 nautical terms have been listed with their first occurrences in Turkish sources, their various etymologies, and semantic applications and contexts, as well as with their variants in various other Romance and non-Romance languages. The term 'Lingua Franca in the Levant' has thus widely assumed the lexicographical meaning of nautical Turkish vocabulary of Western origin, losing its context with the concept of 'lingua franca' in the sociolinguistic sense. As the authors point out in their preface:

"Lingua Franca is here used in a somewhat narrowed meaning. It is restricted to vocabulary alone, and within vocabulary to nautical terms; it is further restricted to terms borrowed by Turkish from the West during the period beginning with Turkish navigation in the Mediterranean in the 13th-15th centuries and continuing through the 18th century, when the Mediterranean nautical terminology was as yet unaffected by the international terminology of modern techniques that permeates it in the 19th century. In short, any term was included in the

study whenever it was reasonable to assume that it had been borrowed by Turkish before the end of the 18th century; it may, of course, and in many instances does, survive into the present." (Kahane et al. 1958: viii).

This specific nautical lexicographical aspect of the Lingua Franca of the Levant, the only one with a certain relevance to Turcological studies, will constitute the main topic addressed in the present entry.

2. The History of Nautical Terms in Turkish

Kahane et al. (1958: 3-38) divide the copying processes of nautical terms between Italian, Greek, and Turkish into four contact periods: (1) initial contacts, (2) the 15th c., (3) the 16th c., and (4) the 17th c. and 18th c.

2.1. The First Contacts to 1400

Although the earliest records of Mediterranean nautical terms in a Turkic language go back to the first contacts of Kipchak tribes with the Mediterranean in the 13th c. and 14th c., these contacts seem to exert little influence upon the formation of an Oghuz Turkish terminology of navigation. The fact that the main coastal areas of Asia Minor during the Seljuk and early Ottoman times remained outside Turkish rule until the 14th c. does not mean that this period was "completely void of contact with the sea" (Kahane et al. 1958: 4).

Apart from a very limited original terminology, e.g., *deŋiz* 'sea'; *ada* 'island'; *gemi* 'ship'; *yelken* 'sail', several words of Turkic origin shifted their meaning from land conditions to the sea. Examples include: *alçak* 'horizon' from 'low'; *burun* 'cape', 'promontory' from 'nose'; *yatak* 'anchorage' from 'place where you can lie', 'bed'; *baş* 'fore', 'prow' from 'head'; *kaburga* 'frame timber' from 'rib'; *oŋurga* 'keel' from 'backbone'; *dil* 'block sheave' from 'tongue'; *göŋlek* 'cover of a sail' from 'shirt'; *seren* 'yard' from 'place where something can be spread out', 'shelf'; *doldurmak* 'to haul taut' from 'to fill'; *kullanmak* 'to sail (a sailing craft)' from 'to use'; *yalpa* 'rolling (of a ship)' from 'slanting', 'uneven' (Kahane et al. 1958: 6-7).

The first non-Turkic nautical terms in a Turkic language were Greek copies into the Kipchak varieties recorded in the *Codex cumanicus* (mainly 14th c.) and the *Kitâb al-idrâk li-lisân al-atrâk* (1312). Such terms are *ḳatarya* 'galley'; *limen* 'port'; *fanar* 'lantern'; *käräb* 'ship'; *sandal* 'barge'. All of them, except *käräb*, became common in Ottoman Turkish (Kahane et al. 1958: 9).

Only four words of Greek origin are recorded in 14th-c. Old Ottoman books, namely *foryaz* 'north or northeast'; *iskele* 'gangplank'; *kürfüz* 'bay', 'gulf'; and *limun* 'port' (Kahane et al. 1958: 10). The word *iskele*, Greek σκάλα, was originally copied from Latin *scala* 'stairs', but already in second-century Byzantine Greek used with the meaning 'gangway' (Kahane et al. 1958: 571).

2.2. The 15th Century

With the conquest of the ports of Gallipoli (14th c.), Salonika (1430), and, of course, Constantinople and Galata (1453), the Ottomans achieved a well-balanced control over the Balkans and Asia Minor with the domination of the Black Sea and the Aegean (Kahane et al. 1958: 13), although the important port cities of the Peloponnese and most islands remained under the dominion of Venice and Genoa. The Ottoman navy was developing considerably, and by the end of the century it could, for the first time, compete with the Venetian fleet. Italian shipbuilders contributed to the naval development of the Ottomans, whilst Greeks played a prominent role in teaching the Turks the art of fishing and coastal navigation (Kahane et al. 1958: 15). Thus, the nautical terminology was significantly enriched by copies from these two languages and their dialect varieties, especially Venetian and Pontic Greek. The Ottoman sources for naval terms in this period are still very limited and confined to archival documents containing lists of warships, objects of taxation, collection of laws; sporadical material can be found in chronicles.

Terms, especially of Greek origin, recorded for the 15th c. include words decribing winds, ports, crafts, instruments, and warfare (Kahane et al. 1958: 16).

From Greek: *fener, iskele, limun, foryaz, sandal, kadirga*, all recorded from the 14th c.; *talaz* 'storm', 'rough sea' ⇐ ϑάλασσα 'sea', 'storm'; *bereme* 'ferryboat' ⇐ πέραμα, *ığripar* 'type of ship' ⇐ *γριπάριον, diminutive γριπαρίδιον; *balamar* 'cable' ⇐ Byzantine παλαμάριν; *talyan, dalyan* 'fishing station' ⇐ *τ'αλιάνειον (Kahane et al. 1958: 481); *kalafat* 'caulker' ⇐ καλαφάτης (Byzantine; probably of Arabic origin).

From Venetian Italian: *kapudan* 'captain' ⇐ *capitan*; *barça* 'type of boat' ⇐ *barza, kalyon* 'galleon' ⇐ *galion*; *iskandil* 'lead' ⇐ *scandiglio*.

2.3. The 16th Century

This period marks the peak of Ottoman power around the Mediterranean and the Back Sea, both in terms of land and sea. The Venetian islands in the Aegean, Rhodes, Chios, and Cyprus were occupied or conquered by the Ottomans by the end of the century. At the same time, the important demographic influx from Spain, i.e., the expulsion of the Muslim population in 1501 by the Catholic Kings and the disappearance of the religious frontier in Asia Minor, caused men from coastal regions with different linguistic background to find a career within the new Turkish naval empire, many of them as corsairs (Kahane et al. 1958: 18). Through this influx the presence of Italian and Greek elements in the Ottoman nautical language was reinforced, and, on the other hand, Turkish did not develop its own naval terminology. Nevertheless, although most

corsairs and crew members of the navy were renegades of non-Turkish origin, Turkish was kept as the main language on the ships and thus contributed as a mediator to the further distribution of non-Turkish sea terms, particularly in Arabic.

The political, economical, and social development of the Ottoman state, especially in the field of seafaring, is reflected in the large amount of available sources for nautical terms. The two outstanding works are the well-known *Kitâb-ı baḥriye* (second version completed in 1525-1526 by Pîrî Re'îs), and the *Muḥîṭ* (compiled by the Captain Seydî 'Alî Re'îs after 1554-1555) (Kahane et al. 1958: 22-24). Archival material, such as lawbooks or administrative documents, serve as further sources. In addition, many Ottoman poetry texts of this period suprisingly provide valuable material for naval terms, including a long encomiastic poem written by the poet Âgehî (d. 1577), which produced numerous imitation poems, so-called *taḥmîs* and *naẓîre*, throughout the long 16th c., as well as other poems containing material for Turkish sea terms (Kahane et al. 1958: 25-29; Tietze 1950-1955, 1951, 1953).

Italian increasingly becomes the primary source for nautical terms, especially for naval commands. Words recorded for the first time in the 16th c. are provided in Kahane et al. (1958: 20-22), together with proposed etymologies.

From Greek: *anafor* 'countercurrent', 'an eddy in a stream' ⇐ αναφόρι (dialectal) 'countercurrent'; *lodos* 'southwind' ⇐ νότος (Byzantine) 'south', 'southwind'; *zifos* 'watersprout' ⇐ ζίφος (Pontic); *mendirek* 'port', 'artificial harbour' ⇐ μανδράκι 'cove'; *fuçı* 'unit of measurement of the loading capacity of a ship' ⇐ βουτσί; *çekeleve* 'spritsail', 'a vessel with spritsail' ⇐ σακκολέβα; *meleksila* 'a smallish sailing-craft used on the Black Sea' ⇐ μονόξυλον (Byzantine) 'canoe'; *farş* 'bottom plank of a ship' ⇐ φάρσα (dialectal); *gönder* 'pole', 'oar' < κοντάριον (Byzantine) 'boatman's pole', 'flagstaff'; *halat* 'a rope', 'a line', especially, 'a hawser' ⇐ καλώδιον (Byzantine) 'rope'; *harti* '(sea) chart' ⇐ χαρτί, *ergalya* 'tool on board ship' ⇐ εργαλειό 'tool', 'reel'; *silisra* 'boatswains's pipe' ⇐ συρίστρια; *olta* 'fishing line' ⇐ βόλτα.

From Italian: *bonatsa*, in later records *bonaça* 'calm' ⇐ *bonaccia*; *fortuna* 'storm, tempest', in later records *firtuna, fırtına* ⇐ Venetian *fortuna* 'storm'; *mağaza* 'store-room on a ship' ⇐ Venetian *magazen* 'store-room in the port or on a ship', originally from Arabic *maḥzen* 'warehouse'; spreading over the entire Mediterranean through Venetian Italian, *baştarda* 'a kind of war-galley' ⇐ *bastarda* 'big galley with round form'; *pergende* 'small man-of-war' ⇐ Venetian *bergantin*; *pupa* 'poop' ⇐ Venetian *pupa*; *fora* 'out' 'ay out!' and derived forms, partly from later sources ⇐Venetian *fora* 'out', 'Lay out!', 'Set the sail!'; *mayna* 'down with...', 'Down it!' ⇐ Venetian *maina*, imperative of *mainar* 'Lower away!'; *dümen* 'rudder' ⇐ Venetian *timon*; *serdemend* 'with the sails in' ⇐ *serratamente* 'tightened'; *busola* with variants *pusola, pusla* 'mariner's compass' ⇐ *bussola*; *luşta* 'a type of mooring rope' ⇐ *usto* 'shot of cable', 'sheet shot'; *forsa* 'vigorously', 'with might', 'fast', 'swift' ⇐*forza* 'effort', Venetian pronunciation *forsa*; *manca* 'sailor's meal' ⇐ *mangia* 'food'.

2.4. The 17th and 18th Centuries

The political decline and static geographic of the Ottoman empire, with the conquest of Crete in 1669 as the end of the Ottoman expansion, is characteristic of this period. Nautical terminology underwent no further substantial development. With the introduction of new types of large sailing ships their names were obviously adopted, whereas galleys and their associated terms became obsolete, however very few new words were needed for sailing and warfare. Nevertheless, 17th-c. and 18th-c. sources report a great deal more material in the field of accessories, as well as further terminology concerning arsenals (dockyards). For the new school for naval engineering, established in 1776, with the addition in 1795 of a department of navigation, instructors and technicians from Europe, especially from France, were recruited. The westernization of the navy diminished the importance of Italian, and marked the beginning of the decay of the 'Lingua Franca' (Kahane et al. 1958: 30). Only the fishing terminology remained predominantly Greek.

The most important sources for nautical terms are the geographical books written in the 17th c. by Evliyâ Çelebî and Kâtib Çelebî. Another very rich source of the last quarter of the 17th c. mentioned by Kahane et al. (1958: 36), is the account of Captain Maḥmûd the Gaoler which provides a lively description of the milieu of the North African Turkish corsairs. The 18th c. did not add any significant sources, other than some naval accounts and documents of minor importance.

Examples for new terms recorded for these later centuries are found in Kahane et al. (1958: 32-35).

From Greek: *felenk* 'roller put under a ship' ⇐ *φαλάγγι*; *sünger* 'sponge' ⇐ *σφουγγάρι*.

From Italian: *firişka* 'a kind of light wind', 'brise' ⇐ *fresco* 'fresh'; *bora* 'strong wind', 'tempest' ⇐ Venetian *bora* 'north or northeast wind'; originally from Greek through Latin, *alabanda* 'sharp turn (to one side)' ⇐ *alla banda*; *boça* 'a kind of missile in naval artillery' ⇐ *boccia* 'powder flask'; *foraroba* 'clear for action' ⇐ Venetian *fora roba*; *pulaka* 'kind of vessel' ⇐ *polacca*.

3. Other Effects of the 'Lingua Franca' on the Turkish Lexicon

An interesting aspect, from the Turcological point of view, is the metaphorical use of some nautical terms in the common language and in the Turkish argot. Some of these are, according to Kahane et al., (1958: 43): *kadırga* 'galley' > 'emaciated person'; *martuka* 'sailing vessel' > 'rascal'; *vardakosta* 'trim sailing vessel' > 'stout but stately woman'; *arma* 'rigging' > 'outfit'; *dümenburun*, literally 'rudder nose', 'crooked nose'; *güverte* 'deck' > 'buttocks'; *kalafat* 'caulking' > 'pomp', 'appearance', 'attire', costume'.

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